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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 001188

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KPAL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD DISCUSSES IRAQ WITH
EGYPTIAN AND ARAB LEAGUE OFFICIALS

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Ambassador Satterfield discussed security and political developments in Iraq, as well as preparations for the International Compact on Iraq and expanded Neighbors conferences in separate April 19 meetings with Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit and Arab League (AL) Secretary General Amre Moussa. Satterfield updated both officials on U.S. policy and sought commitments to engage the GOI leadership to solidify national political reconciliation and stabilization. Aboul Gheit shared plans for the April 22-24 visit to Cairo of PM Maliki and revealed distrust for the Shia leader and sympathy for former PM Allawi. Moussa, welcoming Satterfield's praise of AL efforts to advance political reconciliation among Iraqis, agreed to do more to work with the GOI in this regard. End summary.

Support for Maliki

¶2. (C) In a meeting on April 19, Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit and Ambassador Satterfield discussed Iraqi political and security developments and planning for the May 3-4 International Compact on Iraq (ICI) and expanded Neighbors conferences in Sharm el Sheikh. Acknowledging the competing elements of PM Maliki's character, Satterfield stressed that Maliki considers himself a national leader and praised Egypt for drawing out this feature, for example by hosting Maliki in Cairo on April 22-24. Aboul Gheit said Egypt welcomes the visit, despite Iraqi Sunni objections and the "difficult position" Saudi Arabia has taken, but he questioned Maliki's ability to deliver. Satterfield described Maliki's progress on security in recent months, but emphasized that political reconciliation is essential to achieving lasting security and outlined the need for more concrete progress on issues such as finalizing hydrocarbon legislation and broad de-Ba'athification reform. Maliki's willingness to discuss de-Ba'athification demonstrates that his position has moved, Satterfield said, noting that Maliki nevertheless remains suspicious of Sunni intentions.

¶3. (C) On Ayad Allawi, Satterfield said the USG has told him that his role is to help the Iraqi government succeed and that his regional tours negatively impact Maliki and fuel suspicion. Aboul Gheit noted Egyptian understanding of the need for strong men and countered that the USG should let Allawi meet with regional leaders and should not discount the possibility that if circumstances deteriorate, Allawi may be suited to assume a greater role. Maliki must show

even-handedness on security, Aboul Gheit said, and dismantle the militias permanently and completely. Satterfield agreed. Aboul Gheit questioned the USG's ability to sustain its military and political commitment in Iraq, given the upcoming elections and pressure to withdraw troops.

Conference Preparations

¶4. (C) Aboul Gheit shared and sought USG input on a draft communique for the expanded Neighbors Conference, noting that he had not yet shared it with any other party, including the Iraqis. Aboul Gheit noted the difficulty of communicating with the Iraqis given the lack of an Ambassador in Cairo and his uncertainty over the affiliations of Iraq's Cairo representatives. On conference participation, Aboul Gheit said the Iranians are encouraging the Syrians and Turks not to attend. He noted that when he told Syrian FM Moallem that not participating in Sharm would impact negatively Egypt's cooperation on issues of mutual concern, Moallem reassured him that he will join if invited to a meeting of Arab only neighbors. To address Syrian concerns, Aboul Gheit said he will host an Arab only Neighbors meeting on the morning of the conference. Aboul Gheit suggested that Secretary Rice call her counterparts to ensure attendance, and mentioned the French, Japanese, Turkish, Chinese and Russians in particular.

¶5. (C) On conference format, Aboul Gheit said Egypt proposes to make a 3-4 minute opening statement, to be followed by other statements, and a press conference, which Maliki is welcome to join. MFA spokesman Alaa al-Hadidi clarified separately that Egypt envisions only one session (approximately 10:00-13:00), in which Maliki will offer an

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overview of developments, followed by 1-2 minute statements by the other 22 participants. Satterfield said the U.S. prefers to speak after the neighbors, and Hadidi suggested the following speaking order: Iraq, neighbors (called on in order of request to speak), Arab League, OIC, UN, U.S., EU, non-neighbors. Hadidi proposed that the UN, Iraq and Egypt participate in the Compact press conference and that Iraq and Egypt handle the Neighbors' press conference.

¶6. (C) Ensuring that the Sharm conferences result in follow-on progress will be key, Aboul Gheit and Satterfield agreed. Hadidi confirmed that Egypt has publicly endorsed the proposal for a follow-on meeting in Turkey and said the three working groups and their leaders include: energy (Turkey), security (Syria), refugees (Jordan). Hadidi was non-committal on the issue of Iraqi debt forgiveness, noting only that the issue is under consideration.

Arab League SYG Moussa on Iraq

¶7. (C) In a separate meeting with Ambassador Satterfield on April 19, Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa likened the situation in Iraq to a sinking or badly damaged boat that must be saved to avoid consequences extending beyond Iraq's immediate neighbors. Political reconciliation, he said, not just enhanced security, is necessary because no single group or alliance will succeed without consensus. Moussa questioned whether Iraq is ready internally for reconciliation. Arab countries will not send troops, so the U.S. is "condemned" to do the job, Moussa said. But the real issue, he noted, is how to address the Sunni-Shia rift. Moussa predicted that concrete progress on the Israeli-Palestinian issue would eliminate 50 percent of the tension in Iraq.

¶8. (C) When Moussa questioned the commitment of the Iraqi leadership to pursuing a national agenda, including on security, Satterfield detailed Maliki's progress, noting his actions against elements of armed groups engaged in violence. Moussa said without political progress towards a "new Iraq,"

the militias will return. He stressed Arab League support for Maliki, but underlined that the Shiites cannot rule alone and must build a true coalition. Maliki must talk to his enemies, Moussa urged, recalling that he pressed Harith al Dhari, Jafari, and Hammoudi to talk at the 2005 League-sponsored National Accord Conference on Iraq.

19. (C) Satterfield asked Moussa to reassure Maliki of his central role and that the goal is not to return the Sunnis to power or restore the Ba'ath. Moussa reaffirmed his support for the existing democratic system and ending Shia-Sunni violence, but said the League will continue to receive representatives of all Iraqi groups. AL Chief of Staff Hisham Youssef complained about: the lack of a mechanism for the AL to engage the U.S. on Iraq; the lack of clarity on the U.S. role in the reconciliation process; and the U.S. refusal to discuss troop withdrawal. Satterfield said that the U.S. would welcome more consultations either in Cairo or Washington and reiterated U.S. efforts to push Maliki vigorously on the reconciliation agenda. As for withdrawal, the U.S. has made clear the indications or benchmarks for success that would allow force reductions, but will not discuss explicit timelines or numbers.

JONES